DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 840 TM 028 416

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TITLE Towards a Stimulating Policy for Self-Evaluation in Schools.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Administration; *Educational Improvement; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Policy Formation; *Quality Control; *School Based Management; *Self Evaluation (Groups)
IDENTIFIERS *Belgium (Flanders)

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of policy to facilitate self-examination by schools. The context is that of Flanders (Belgium), although there are implications for other school systems. In Flanders, more and more schools are becoming autonomous as they are being given some responsibility for providing high quality education, the supervision of educational quality is carried out by a corps of inspectors, and educational quality is judged by certain standards of attainment. Schools themselves are responsible for designing their own policy plan and vision, while the government concentrates on controlling and assessing the results of education. Self-evaluation is necessary in order that schools can carry out their own policies within the overall framework of Flemish education. At the macro level, an encouragement policy can be set up that will prompt schools toward self-evaluation within the framework of quality control. At a "meso" level, school management can support self- evaluation under the leadership of the principal. Linked to encouragement of self-evaluation at the meso level are activities of the government's counseling services for school administrators. In-service teacher training can encourage self-evaluation in the schools. Experienced teachers will probably be the driving force behind school self-evaluation, but there is a place in teacher education for the self-evaluation concept. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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Symposium by the Vlaams Forum voor Onderwijsonderzoek

(Flemish Forum for Educational Research, Belgium)

ED 419 840

"Evaluation of a national policy of quality improvement in schools: external requierements versus local implementation patters"

Towards a stimulating policy for self-evaluation in schools

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TM028416

Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, 1988

Towards a stimulating policy for self-evaluation in schools

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1. Introduction

In Flanders schools in primary and secondary education have only fairly recently developed interest in the idea of self-evaluation. Gradual steps are carefully being taken at government level. More and more schools are becoming more autonomous as they are being given some responsibility for providing high quality education. The increased attention and interest for self-evaluation of schools is by no means accidental, but is to be situated within the larger framework of current policy context.

First we will shortly describe the general legislation regarding educational quality concern in primary and secondary education (2.1) and in higher and univerisity education (2.2). In 2.3. we will focus on the framework of education policy within which an increased interest in self-evaluation can to be situated.

For the next part, we refer to the three other papers presented at the Symposium by the Vlaams Forum voor Onderwijsonderzoek (Flemish Forum for Education Research), namely the papers from G. Kelchtermans & R. Vandenberghe (1998), G. Devos (1998) and H. Vanthuyne, K. Staessens and R. Vandenberghe (1998). These papers are elaborations of the legislation and tendencies concerning internal and external quality concern in Flanders for the different educational levels (resp. primary, secondary and higher education).

We will finally pause with the possible policy implications for facilitating implementation of self-evaluation as a strategic instrument for quality control.

2. General policy context

2.1. Legislation for primary and secondary education

Before 1991, inspectors of education needed to combine two almost incompatible tasks namely control and assistance. Control is needed to check that community funds or subsidies

are well used by schools. That necessitates the possibity to sanction and thus supposes a hierarchical relation between the inspector and the teacher. Assistance is ment to support teachers to use their qualities as instructor as good as possible. Assistance is not very effective under the threat of impending penalties. In these circumstances, it is very difficult for inspectors to lend support to teachers.

A new law (Decree regarding inspection and educational counselling services', 17.07.1991) made a distinction between both activities. The idea was that the division of control and assistance would provide a fair substratum for the improvement of educational quality.
The inspectorate is now responsible for the quality supervision of all schools. The assistance rol no longer takes part of the inspectors task, but is the responsability of a new professional body, the so called 'educational counsellors'.

The supervision of quality of education is carried out by a corps of inspectors. They supervise all school in the different educational networks (every school should be evaluated by the Inspectorate each six years).
Educational quality is judged according to certain standards of attainment. There are different final terms, according to the level and type of education. The Inspectorate examines whether the final terms are realised and whether some other organizational obligations (e.g. a minimum curriculum) are applied.
The primary focus of the inspectorate is no longer (as it was before 1991) the functioning of an individual teacher in a classroom, but a team of inspectors evaluates the whole school as a unit, which means that the Inspectorate is no longer subject-oriented.
Should any shortcomings come to light, then a school must be able to appeal to the educational counsellors.

In Belgium (m.s. Flanders) each educational network is free to develop its own educational project, which implicates that counselling is organized per network. Within each networks educational counselling services are charged with assisting staff members and schools in the general educational field. The advisers assist teachers and schools to help them to use their qualities as instructors and educators in the best possible way. Their task is not to control the school and its staff but to guide and support them.

2.2. Legislation for higher and university education

The Flemish university decree (1991) and the Decree for higer education institutes (1994) are very similar regarding the issue of quality improvement and control. The decrees require universities and higher education institutes to engage in internal and external quality assurance themselves, and they give responsibility to the government to monitor the quality.

We make a distinction between internal and external quality assurance.
On the one hand, univerisities have the duty to monitor their education and research activities continiously (internal quality assurance).
On the other hand, universities are obliged to carry out regularly (every five years) a comparative research into the quality of education, together with other universities in Flanders (and the Netherlands). The starting point of the procedure is a critical self-analysis carried out in the context of the internal quality assurance system. The quality of the education activities need to be assessed by a group of independent experts from Belgium and abroad. The committee of indepedent experts produce a public report of its findings.
With respect to internal quality assurance, higher education institutes are obliged to set up an internal quality systems. Experiments are going on with educational adaptations of models and systems like ISO9001 and EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management).
The restructuring of the higher education is so recent, that there's no experience with external quality assurance. [We make mention of one exception i.c. the one-cycle basic courses. For the time being, the Higher Education Inspectorate scrutinizes the strenghts and weaknesses of these basic courses.]
We can observe that the higher education institutes and universities are responsible for both internal quality improvement and external quality management.

The governmental authorities are responsible for the evaluation of the evaluation practice (internal and external) of the higher educational institutes (meta-evaluation). They can also regularly organize comparative studies into the quality of educational activities for specific (groups of) courses. The government will also see that the results of this research are incorporated in the policy in the institutions and will monitor whether sufficient account is taken of the results.

2.3. Policy context related to self-evaluation

In the beginning of the nineties it was pointed out an OECD-report that quality control in Belgium was in a poor state (OECD,1991). This stimulated the development of the above-mentioned decree defining a long term view for quality control in Flemish education.
In the meantime Flemish regulations regarding this matter concern all levels of education. Form as well as modalities of quality control by the authorities have been clearly described within the legislation.
Quality control by schools or institutions themselves, however, although explicitly included in the legislation concerning higher education, has to date (1998) not been the case for primary and secondary education, in contrast with the legislation for higher and univerisity education. Earlier we already refered to this as a serious gap in the legislation.'The institutions of primary and secondary education are neither stimulated nor forced by the decree to carry out internal quality control' (Van Petegem, 1994, p.15)
Later we read in a Flemish government agreement (dated 1995) that the government will in future appeal more strongly on the autonomy and responsibility of primary and secondary schools. The government does not make itself scarce, but does restrict itself to its basic tasks: providing the means in exchange for clear agreements about putting into practice minimal objectives or attempting to do so.

Schools themselves are responsible for designing their own policy planning and view. The government concentrates on controlling/assessing the results of education. Deciding in which way these results are to be achieved has become a responsibility for the autonomous school.

For a school to arrive at its own policyplan and long term policyview it has to be able to come to grips with its own way of functioning. 'As strategic organisations schools will need to become designers of their own future' (Van den Berg, 1990, p. 21). A plan or long term view of the future needs to start from the present situation. Therefore evaluating this situation is imperative. Also - preferably explicit- choices will have to be made in order to work out this plan and orient it towards the long term goal. The demand for materials and strategies in order to enable them to achieve this has become enormous. There is an apparent need for instruments enabling efficient and adequate self-evaluation of a school's functioning. This demand for such self-evaluation instruments does not only come from the education field, also in the domain of research it is to be felt. In his research-diary Scheerens (1992) calls for the

development of valid and reliable instruments focusing on education results as well as process aspects.(p. 24)

This growing interest in quality control that can be noticed in Flemish education, more specifically the interest in self-evaluation, is not an accidental one. From the nineteen seventies onwards an increased attention for this phenomenon could be seen on an international level. Forerunner in the nineteen twenties was the creditsystem in the USA and Canada, in which educational institutions and/or education programmes were being recognised (Gray & Maxwell, 1995).
Other often quoted phenomena were the so called Spoetnik psychosis and the publication of alarming reports about American education, e.g. A nation at risk of the National Commission for Excellence in Education (1984). Also evolutions in governmental (education) policy in England were clear on this issue (see a.o. Docking, 1996; Shaw, 1996).
Perhaps it was the economic slump that brought about an enhanced interest in quality control (Husén & Tuijnman, 1994).
The topic was brought under the attention of influential international organisations like UNESCO, OECD, and international research groups like the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) who conduct large scale international comparative studies, among others about quality control.
The dissemination of large scale investigations like the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) in the USA are more than likely to have brought the topic into the spotlight.

The last few decades we have equally seen a decrease in the belief of the makability of society. This also means that with this the idea of 'the makability of education is equally threatened' (Elchardus, 1994, p. 40).
The current education policy aim is to grant the schools a greater autonomy to enable them to develop policies on a local scale. In times of recession there is always a greater demand for accountability of how resources are being used . This is certainly also the case in education. Both these influences work together in synergy towards an interest in quality control. On the one hand institutes for education receive more autonomy allowing room for local policy but on the other hand these decisions need to be accounted for to the society. This autonomy does not in itself necessarily lead to good quality education; what it can do, however, is create the conditions needed for this.'Whether or not a school makes good use of this possibility and

whether or not such a school policy leads to a better quality of education, largely depends on the conditions in which this school functions'(Netelenbos, 1995, p. 23).

There are a number of aspects of the Flemish education policy that exercise an additional stimulus to using self-evaluation as a strategic instrument towards quality control (Van Petegem , 1996). As already mentioned the present government strongly stresses greater autonomy for schools e.g. through the mechanism of deregulation. This tendency from the part of the government enhances the importance of self-evaluation. These changes in relationships between central and local authorities bring about similar changes in responsibilities for quality control in education. Monard (1995) put it as follows: 'Every school or institute is the first to be held responsible for the quality of its education. It will develop its own policy in this respect and evaluate it' (p. 232).

When the 1991 Decree was put into action, this led to a completely renewed approach to inspection, the educational counselling services and a Service for Education Development (DvO). These various partners were given a different role each with regards to maintaining quality in education. In this way the decree issued the possibilities to shape the various instances concerned with quality control, except for one partner ... the school itself.

Apart from the above mentioned policy tendencies and provisions made by decree, some other evolutions have facilitated an increased attention for self-evaluation.
In the field of in-service teacher training (INSET), there is a new tendency in the direction of training - on-demand. It is no longer the supply, but rather the demand that will determine what type of training will be offered. Consequently the suppliers need to conduct teacher training needs and expectation analyses.These needs and expectations do not just appear out of the blue, but ideally they are the result of well considered choices and decisions.
When these choices are the result of intense deliberation, this will be preceded by an evaluation of one's own functioning with regards to establishing weaknesses. Self-evaluation seems to be an ideal instrument to establish where the weak points, shortcomings, and space for improvement are to be situated and to explicitate them. This will make the choices for the type of training desired better thought of, which will consolodate itself in a training policy.

We conclude in saying that the increased attention for quality control at an international level has also had an impact on education practice in Flanders as well as on the agenda of education

policy makers and legislators. With regards to quality control responsibilities for primary and secondary schools, the present decree provisions are deficient.
In our opinion the principle should be incorporated in the decrees for the different levels (both primary and secondary levels), principle involving the school itself in the responsibility for education quality along with the community inspectorate.

3. Policy implications

Generating implications for education policy based on research is generally a precarious matter. It needs to be done with the utmost caution. Yet we can point out a number of implications for education policy on both the macro and meso levels. These recommendations point in the direction of a policy that would facilitate implementation of self-evaluation as a strategic instrument for quality control. By no means are we suggesting a policy that would put forward self-evaluation as an end in itself as this would not create an added value for education practice.
We are therefore slightly reluctant when reading in MacBeath et al. (1996) that self-evaluation should be priority number one at national level and 'should be central in any national approach to school improvement' (p. 92).

It is no coincidence that in the above paragraph the meso level or classroom practice is not mentioned. It is precisely this level that we consider to be most reluctant in carrying forward research findings.
We are rather looking at the contours of policy of encouragement, within which self-evaluation can be administered as a strategic instrument for quality control.
First we will point out a number of policy measures at macro level (1)
followed by meso level (2). Then we will look into in-service and pre-service teacher training (3).

3.1. Implications at the macro level

At the macro level an encouragement policy can be set up that will prompt schools towards self-evaluation within the framework of Quality Control. The government should at least consider this because of the effect self-evaluation can have on the governing potential of

schools and their potential for self-reflection (Bunt & Van Hees, 1991). Such an encouragement policy is a logical consequence of the government plan to grant schools greater autonomy.

Possible instruments the government can use at present in order to conduct an encouragement policy with regards to self-evaluation are rather restricted . We can distinguish a series of more direct and a series of indirect mechanisms.

A direct mechanism to stimulate self-evaluation is passing on information to schools by the government about existing instruments and procedures for self-evaluation. In this respect we think of spreading a resource book containing information about existing instruments for self-evaluation of schools. Such resource books can give a survey of self-evaluation instruments describing objectives, procedures,quality and cost.

Another direct mechanism the government has at its disposal in order to stimulate self-evaluation of schools is making this issue a top priority within its own in-service teacher training programme (INSET). Perhaps this lies within the broader topic of stimulating schools' governing capacities. We refer to Devos (1998) who shows that 'schools with a low policy-making capacity will not be able to monitor the self-evaluation in an appropriate way'. Such training is directed first of all at school management, the school board, and teachers interested in the matter. In a second stage stimulating school-based training involving the complete school staff should be considered (Fullan, 1990, p. 4 a.f.). Approval of valuable teacher training projects regarding self-evaluation of schools could also have a stimulating effect.

A relatively direct - but perhaps rather perfidious - mechanism could be the adjustment of the workings of the community inspection teams so that schools would be tempted to evaluate themselves. This could be made possible when inspectors would concentrate on a meta-control of schools, rather than a strict control of the school as such,or - somewhat less far reaching - when a team of inspectors would include in their reports of an inspection round to what extent the school evaluates its own functioning (compare higher education). Even this could already have a possible stimulating effect on schools.

Yet we need to be sufficiently cautious here. The more pressure is exercised from above regarding setting up action for self-evaluation, the greater the risk for undesired effects.

Admitted, within this context a possible end/means confusion could be created. That which is regarded by the inspection as a means of quality control, viz. checking whether the school evaluates its own functioning, can become an end in itself for the schools. The line of thought that could come from this is the following: 'self-evaluation is what the inspectors require, so self-evaluation is what we shall organize' pour le besoin de la cause. Whereas self-evaluation is a means to an end it soon becomes an end in itself for those concerned, precisely because it is what the inspectors are asking for.

If we persist in this frame of mind, then education inspection should only concern itself with education results. All the rest is inferior to that and can lead to undesired effects That would mean that schools need to be far more strongly oriented towards evaluating their own processes. Guarding this from without by means of a control body could have a negative effect. ' The more pressure from without, the more self-evaluation becomes an end in its own right and that is precisely what needs to be avoided (...). (It) leads to fake behaviour and paper dragons' (Van Petegem , 1996, p. 15).

In order to avoid such excesses we need to watch out carefully that the results of process evaluation - an sich - are in the first place meant to be used by the schools themselves and do not serve another purpose, which is accountability of schools to external bodies. The balance between external stimuli and internal care is an extremely subtle one. There will undoubtedly always be some need for external stimulus in order to keep the flame of internal care awake, but this should by no means be overdone. (Frederiks et al., 1993, p. 108).

On the macro level we can see that some policy options have already been taken that can have a stimulating effect on self-evaluation of schools. We hereby think of really granting the school more autonomy, in practice as well as on paper. This leads to the fact that the power of schools to conduct an independent school policy should increase. Self-evaluation seems an appropriate instrument in order to fill the thus created space for policy adequately. This means that the policy space needs to be filled by the schools themselves and not taken in c.q. sucked up by intermediaries. (Sleegers, 1991).

Strictly speaking we can say that schools when left to themselves as far as shaping their education will spontaneously feel the need for self-evaluation of those aspects preceding the

achieved education results and therefore co accountable for them in a positive or negative sense.

Another possible part of an indirect stimulating policy on the part of the government is educational research financed by this government. As has just been pointed out, it is stimulating self-evaluation which is the logical outcome of an education policy view in which more autonomy for schools is stressed. Financing such research can only increase the expertise in this field in Flanders. It can be mentioned that within the framework of research projects financed by the Flemish government some promising projects of this nature have started.

3.2. Implications at the meso level

Responsibility for policy at meso level regarding quality control in general and self-evaluation in particular converges at the school management, which has a key position in establishing the choice of policy regarding quality control at school and therefore also regarding self-evaluation. 'If he or she is not convinced of the usefulness of the (...) strategy then it probably will not work' (Hopkins, 1989, p. 131).
This means that schools are in need of principals that realise and feel the importance of such a strategy, but who - above all- can bear the responsibility of carrying out such a task. (Ainscow & Southworth, 1994).
School principals therefore need to be willing to optimalize their competence in matters of this kind; this is situated within the larger framework of general professional development of school principals. Cronbach et al. (1980) refer to professional development as a necessary condition for the improvement of evaluation practice.
But, 'the principle alone is seldom able to ensure the success (...), and principals can be worked around' (Weindling, 1989, p. 54). This willingness towards professional development - which is a prerequisite- is equally necessary for anyone involved in the school organisation who play a part in shaping the school's policy. Although this definition can theoretically include any member of the school community, we would first envisage these members of staff with functions like grade co-ordinators, workshop leaders.

Directly linked to an encouragement policy towards the meso level are the activities of the educational counselling services. We can see that a great many valuable initiatives have

originated from this. As we consider this of the greatest importance we think it necessary to - continue to - invest in these people's competence in order to enable to support the process of self-evaluation in schools adequately, but also to initiate and facilitate it (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998).

3.3. In and pre-service teacher training

We have already sketched above how the government can conduct a stimulating policy towards self-evaluation of schools through in-service training programmes. As this in-service training is intended to become much more tailor-made in the future and at the request of the schools, it will be the schools' percepted needs that will greatly determine in how far the issue will be apparent on this market. The guiding principle here reminds us of radio request programmes. Those who are offering the training programmes have the responsibility of ensuring the quality aspect of the issue.

Should there be a place for the issue of self-evaluation in initial teacher training? Undoubtedly the answer is yes, but we do not think that this is thé domain where a detailed investigation of self-evaluation should primarily find its place. Initial competence of teachers deserves to be much more in the spotlight there. In practice it will likely be the more experienced teachers who will be the driving force behind self-evaluation initiatives. There certainly should be room for the theme of self-evaluation within the general-pedagogic orientation of future teachers. Learning to critically evaluate instruments and procedures in view of putting this into practice in their own situation presupposes that teachers are ready for this kind of themes. (cf. Fuller's involvement approach, 1969). That is why we have chosen to situate the issue of self-evaluation rather within the context of in-service training.

We would not like to deprive the reader of Reynolds' opinions regarding this matter, which he uttered in his inaugural speech in his style :'Some say that it is unethical to impose prior definitions of what are 'effective' practices upon trainees as taken for granted educational knowledge. For myself, if we do have valid knowledge as to what helps children to develop, then I would regard it as unethical not to give it. Others say that giving knowledge of effective practices prevents trainees from discovering what is their own effective practice, even though I would argue that the effectiveness knowledge base would facilitate this' (quoted in Brown, et al., 1995, p. 13).

In conclusion we can establish that in meso and macro level policy a number of elements can contribute to a possible encouragement plan for self-evaluation. The same can be said for both in- service and pre-service teacher training.

4. Conclusion

The question should be asked whether in the future schools will need self-evaluation to optimise the quality of their education.

We dare say 'yes'. We have all reason to believe that self-evaluation is a strategic instrument for quality control. Self-evaluation seems also to be desired when setting up a long term school policy plan.

This idea is not a new one; Thales of Milete already phrased it as 'γνωτι σε αυτον', know yourself. This principle still, holds, even more than two thousand years later. Quality control starts with self-knowledge. 'An improving school is a self-evaluating school', is how Stoll & Fink (1996, p. 171) so concisely put it.

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